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RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/27/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: BURMESE ARMY POSSIBLY PREPARING FOR KAREN STATE OFFENSIVE

REF: A. A) RANGOON 1168 (INCREASED ACTIVITY IN KAREN STATE)

[1](#)B. B) RANGOON 1103 (KNU'S RELUCTANT FIST)

CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) The Burma Army (BA) is deploying more soldiers than usual to Karen State in possible preparation for a new offensive, according to Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and Karen National Union (KNU) contacts. Normally, the BA maintains a 40-50-battalion strong presence in the area with new units rotating in as old ones are relieved. This year, however, units that were in Karen State in November did not rotate out as new ones arrived. Presently, there are over 80 BA battalions in northern Karen State, according to both sources. FBR reports the battalions are deployed as follows: Toungoo District, 23; Nyaunglebin District, 33; Papun District, 28. On paper, a BA battalion is supposed to have at least 800 troops although actual strength is now often well below 50 percent of that.

[1](#)2. (C) According to KNU Central Committee Member Isaac Po, the BA troops' main tasks are accumulating rations and construction of new roads. Po asserted that the roads under construction will be used for logging and to resupply troops. He said that Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA - the KNU's military wing) troops have already destroyed five BA bulldozers involved in road construction - two in southern Karen State and three in the north, but noted the KNLA'S offensive capabilities remain constrained due to limited supplies and reduced troop strength. The BA has also built a new base on the border of Papun, Toungoo and Nyaunglebin Districts, he said, speculating that the BA will build up rations and supplies at this base that they may use in a possible offensive.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: Though neither source reported any on-going major BA attacks in Karen State, they pointed out that military activity in Karen State has been unusually high recently, even for the normally active dry season. Under increased international pressure to begin a genuine dialogue, and with the constitutional drafting process underway, the regime may feel the need to eliminate remaining Karen resistance and may hope that it can deliver a knockout blow against the KNU this time.

[1](#)4. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassies Rangoon and Bangkok.

MORROW